

Middle Arkansas Subbasin Newsletter

OCTOBER 2004

By Subbasin Water Resource Management Program

Inside this issue:

Circle K Habitat Restoration	2
The National Flood Insurance Program	3
Kansas Streamlines Food Inspection Process	4
Irrigation Transition Assistance Program	4
Precipitation Information	5
Public Meeting Announcements	6

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Middle Arkansas River Subbasin Management Strategies Summary

A working group of local stakeholders, consisting of residents of the Middle Arkansas River subbasin and other governmental agencies, developed voluntary management strategies to address issues related to water resource concerns in the region. Throughout the course of this project, the working group has evolved into a knowledgeable working group in respect to understanding the hydrological conditions of the subbasin. The working group has concentrated efforts on developing voluntary approaches in lowering water usage in the subbasin, rather than imposing strict administration of water rights. As a result, the implementation of these strategies will not provide a "quick fix" solution to the issues of the region. The success of these management strategies, as well as the degree of effectiveness, will depend on the education and participation of the water users in the Middle Arkansas River subbasin. They have been actively seeking maximum participation by water users in the subbasin since January 2004.

Middle Arkansas River subbasin management strategies do not meet all water conservation needs for the subbasin. Division of Water Resources staff recommendations are being drafted to address the additional water conservation needed in the subbasin.

For a copy of the Middle Arkansas Subbasin Management Strategies, contact Eve Tracy at (785) 296-3705 or etracy@kda.state.ks.us. It also can be found on the website at www.ksda.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=194.

Water Issue Strategic Plan

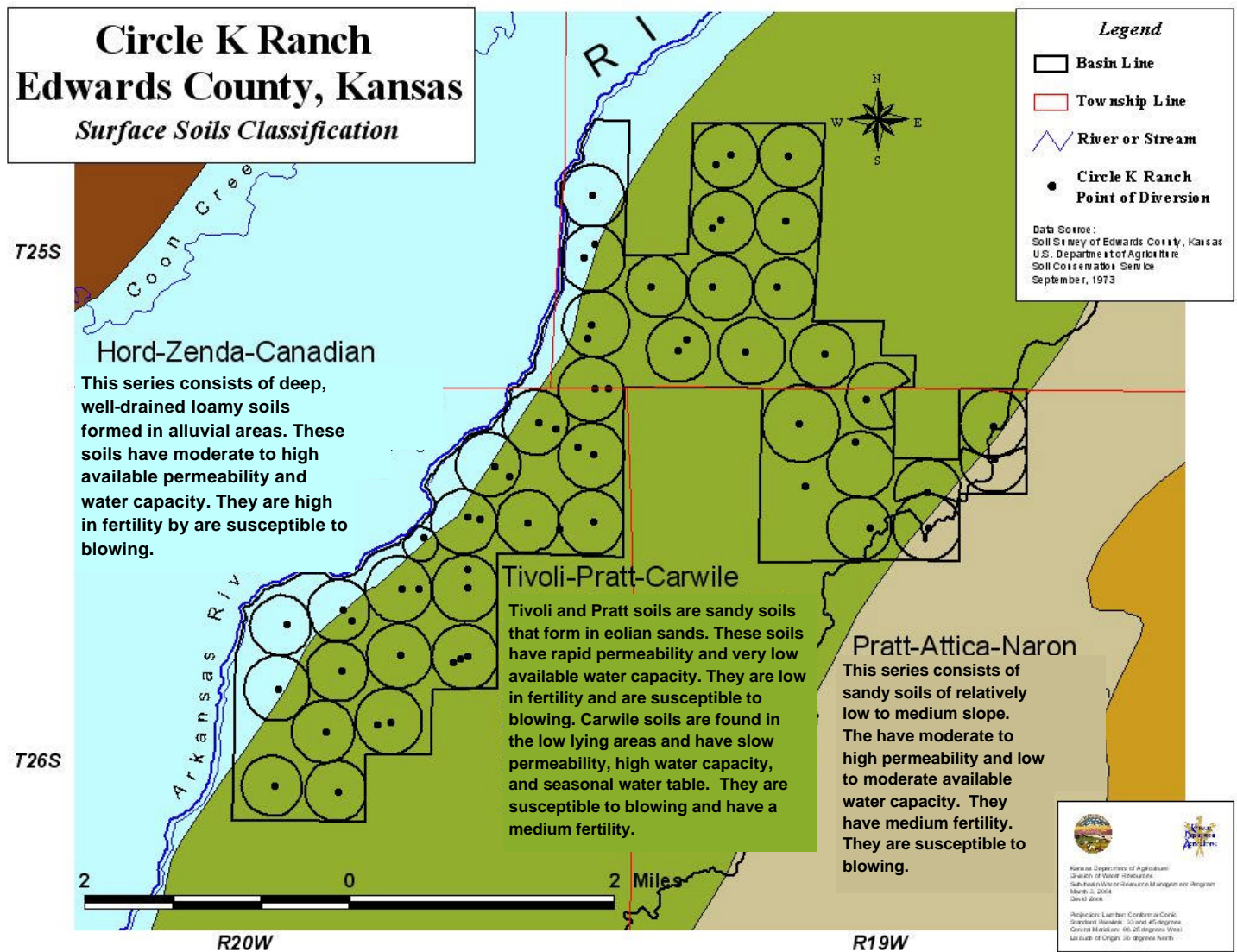
The Water Issue Strategic Plan is designed to evaluate projects identified in the State Water Plan. The Middle Arkansas River subbasin project is being evaluated for the effectiveness of meeting the State Water Plan sustainability goal in the subbasin by 2015. The following are the goals, objectives and strategies to meet this 2015 goal.

Goal: Maintain a healthy groundwater and surface water system with long-term management strategies that fall within the framework of state water law.

Priority Objectives and Strategies:

1. Develop a preliminary report of findings for water use reduction to achieve long-term, sustainable yield management in the Middle Arkansas River subbasin.
2. Implementation of administrative and enforcement components necessary in the Middle Arkansas River subbasin to be initiated in fiscal year 2005.
3. Kansas Geological Survey numerical model for Middle Arkansas River subbasin to be completed in December 2005.
4. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks acquisition of Circle K Ranch to retire irrigation water rights to stabilize groundwater levels.

For information on the Kansas State Water Plan WISP, contact Susan Stover, KWO, at (785) 296-0876 or sstover@kwo.state.ks.us. It can also be found at www.kwo.org/kwp/.



Circle K Habitat Restoration

By LeAnn Schmitt, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

The Circle K Ranch project offers a unique opportunity to work toward sustainable water usage in the Middle Arkansas River subbasin, while diversifying the economy of the area by creating a publicly accessible outdoor recreation area.

If the state Legislature approves the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks' purchase of the ranch, up to 75 percent of the cost of the ranch will be reimbursed by the federal government if it is opened to public hunting. This money will come from the federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition, known as the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act. The land also will provide opportunities for birding, wildlife viewing and hiking.

The success of this project is dependent on restoring the area's natural habitat. Most importantly, the ranch's sandy soils will need to be stabilized. Currently, the Circle K, which borders the Arkansas River on the southeast side, has 41 irrigated circles, as well as areas of natural prairie vegetation. Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks plans to gradually reduce the irrigated cropland, while restoring native vegetation.

The entire ranch has basically the same type of unstable sandy soil. Restoring the native vegetation will not be easy, and it will take several years of intense management. However, by restoring the natural habitat and managing it appropriately, both game and non-game animal species should flourish. Deer (both whitetail and mule), turkey, rabbits (both cottontails and jackrabbits), bobwhite quail, and pheasants are plentiful in areas of native sand hill prairie and the Arkansas River valley that border the Circle K. Lesser Prairie Chickens also inhabit nearby areas, and department biologists know that by restoring the ranch to native habitat the prairie chickens will reestablish themselves on the land.

Circle K Habitat Restoration

Continued

Once KDWP has the property, each field will need to be analyzed to determine what crop was last planted there and what chemicals have been used on the ground. As I said earlier, establishing the native grasses will not be easy. In the first year, a cover crop such as milo or cane will be planted to create a microclimate for the grass to germinate and grow. The second year, grasses will be planted in the spring. Depending on rainfall and other factors, the grass may need to be replanted the following year. A mixture of grasses will be planted, including side-oats grama, switch grass, sand lovegrass, and sand

bluestem. In time, forbs (wildflowers) will either be deliberately interseeded or will naturally interseed from the surrounding natural areas. Also, over time, native shrubs such as sand plum will grow across the area.

While most of the ranch will be returned to native grasses, it is possible that some areas, particularly those furthest from the river, could continue to be farmed for several years. Kansas grasslands evolved due to grazing, so KDWP will use grazing as a natural process by which to manage the habitats found on the Circle K. Controlled grazing helps maintain the health of native prairie grasses by aiding in the nutrient cycling necessary for rigorous plant growth. Also, wildlife food plots containing forbs and legumes will be part of the overall management plan. The mix of grassland, food plots, and water sources creates the richest habitat for both game and non-game animals.

Upland habitat is not the only type of habitat the KDWP hopes to restore on the ranch. Modeling by the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources has indicated that retiring the irrigation wells on the Circle K could go a long way toward returning base flow to the adjacent Arkansas River. Prairie streams provide an oasis for the many wildlife species in the relatively arid prairies of western Kansas. Songbirds, squirrels, deer, turkey and many other species thrive in the riparian vegetation along streams and creeks in the western half of Kansas.

As for the river itself, it takes only a minimal amount of water to create a home for fish, snails, freshwater mussels, beaver and muskrat. Recently, for example, water began flowing in a stretch of the Arkansas River near Larned where water hadn't flowed in at least seven years. Within two days time, minnows, frogs and snails inhabited the crystal clear flow that was only a couple of inches deep.

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Lesser Prairie Chicken

The National Flood Insurance Program in Kansas

By Rhonda Montgomery, Floodplain Program

In 1968, Congress created the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in response to the rising cost of taxpayer funded disaster relief for flood victims and the increasing amount of damage caused by floods. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) within the Department of Homeland Security manages the NFIP, and oversees the floodplain management and mapping components of the program.

There are 330 Kansas communities that participate in the NFIP by adopting and enforcing floodplain management ordinances to reduce future flood damage. Participation in the NFIP makes federally backed flood insurance available to homeowners, renters and business owners in these communities.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture's, Floodplain Program implements the NFIP in the state of Kansas by assisting FEMA, counties and local communities in carrying out the goals of the NFIP. If you have questions about flood insurance or what you and your community can do to reduce its risk to flooding, please contact the Floodplain Program at (785) 296-4622.

Kansas Streamlines Food Inspection Process Effective October 1

By Lisa Taylor, Kansas Department of Agriculture

The state of Kansas is reorganizing and streamlining its food safety licensing and inspection activities for grocery stores and other licensed food processors and vendors effective October 1, 2004.

The change is the result of Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' Executive Reorganization Order 32, issued January 14, which transfers certain food safety functions from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

"Food safety for Kansas consumers will continue to be one of state government's highest priorities," said Roderick L. Bremby, secretary of KDHE. "We're just streamlining the process to be more efficient and to give businesses single points of contact on food safety issues."

With this change, the Kansas Department of Agriculture will begin licensing and inspecting approximately 3,700 Kansas grocery stores, restaurants in grocery stores, food processing plants, mobile ice cream vendors, food vending machines and food vending machine companies/dealers.

"The new duties are a good fit with our department's egg, dairy and meat and poultry food safety inspections," said Adrian Polansky, secretary of the Kansas Department of Agriculture. "The new structure will allow us -- KDA and KDHE -- to use our food safety staff more effectively and allow businesses to license with one state agency instead of two."

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment will continue to license and inspect approximately 11,000 Kansas restaurants, school food service operations, senior meal sites, mobile food units and all lodging facilities.

"KDHE will now more closely focus on those consumer food safety issues that typically pose more challenges due to the complex processes in preparation and holding of foods for immediate consumption," said Bremby.

In anticipation of the change, food safety staff from both agencies have spent the last few months working together to ensure a smooth transition. Also, six employee positions will transfer from KDHE to KDA to help round out that agency's food safety staff to accommodate their new responsibilities.

"We've been working diligently to prepare for this transition and we will continue to collaborate after Oct. 1 to ensure the highest standards of food safety are met," said Polansky.

The reorganization of food safety responsibilities outlined in Gov. Sebelius' Executive Reorganization Order 32 was approved by the 2004 Kansas Legislature and expanded upon in Senate Bill 296. Neither action changed Kansas food safety regulations.

Irrigation Transition Assistance Program

By Scott Carlson, State Conservation Commission

The State Conservation Commission is developing a pilot irrigation transition assistance program to receive and disburse irrigation assistance grant funds providing an incentive for water right holders to transition from irrigated to dryland production or permanent vegetation. Grantees would have their contracted water right(s) dismissed. The goal of the program is to provide another tool in meeting the water management goals of the state and local units of government in restoring stream flows and reducing aquifer decline in priority areas. The irrigation transition assistance program is a result of a 2004 Kansas legislative action that requires the SCC to develop Kansas Administrative Regulations under the authority of conservation district law.

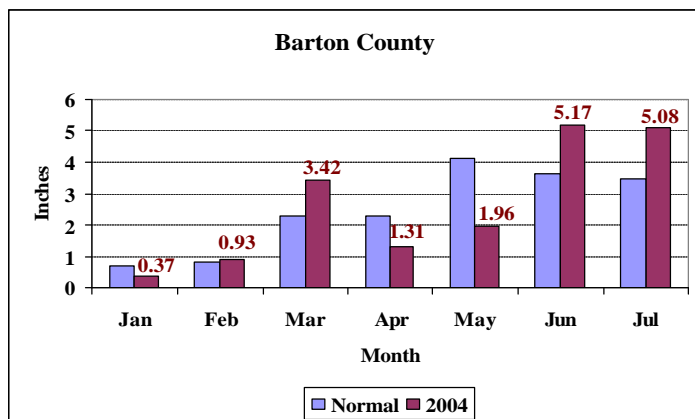
The irrigation transition assistance program may use state or federal funds. There may be federal funds available in spring 2005. Additionally, \$1.3 million has been requested as part of the State Water Plan projects initiative for state fiscal year 2006, which begins July 1, 2005. If the irrigation transition assistance program is funded, the first sign-up period is scheduled for fall 2005. Of the total requested, \$400,000 will be targeted to the Rattlesnake Subbasin to help Groundwater Management District #5 meet the goals of their management plan approved by the chief engineer. The balance will be expended in high priority subunits in the High Plains Aquifer.

The approval process includes a 60-day review period, which is tentatively scheduled to begin in early October. Also, a public hearing tentatively scheduled for December 14 will allow public input before final approval and adoption of the regulations by March 2005.

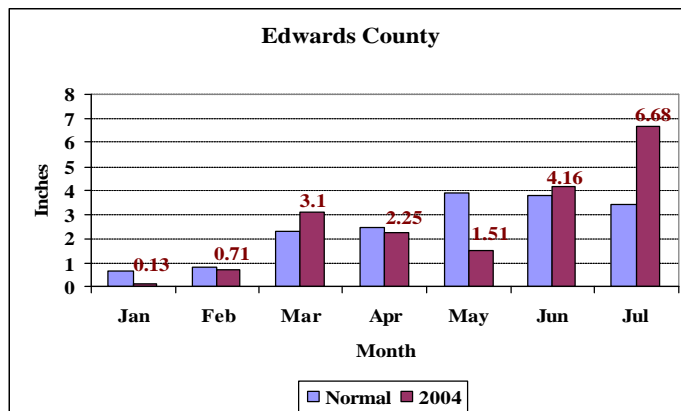
Precipitation Information

By Eve Tracy, Subbasin Water Resource Management Program

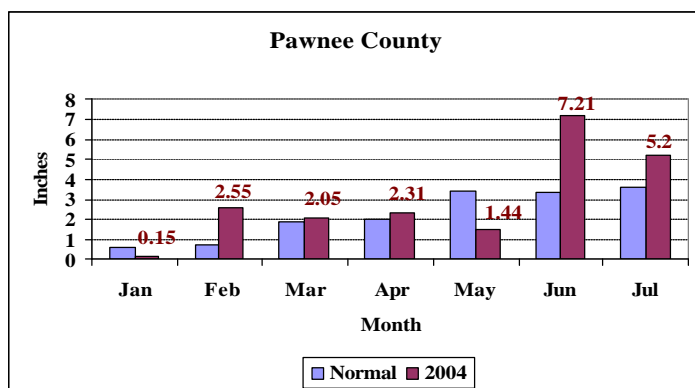
Rainfall reports for all stations in Barton, Edwards, Pawnee, Rice and Stafford counties have been represented in the following graphs. Normal refers to a 30-year average (1971-2000) that is updated every 10 years. The data was gathered from the Kansas State University Research and Extension Services. For more information on precipitation data, visit the KSU Research and Extension Services website at <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/wdl/wdl/pmaps.htm>.



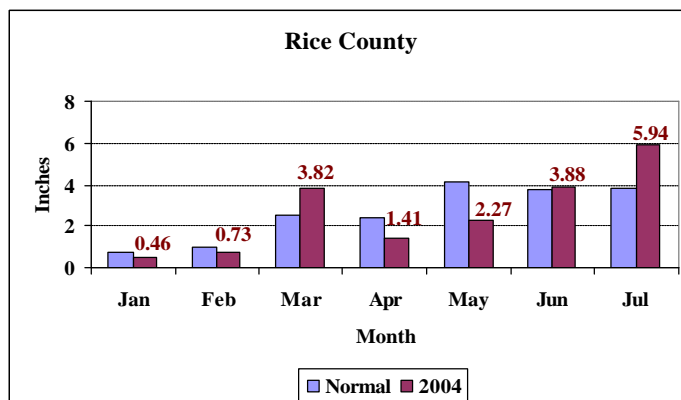
The 30 year average for Barton County is 26.62 inches. In 2004, precipitation was above average, receiving 18.22 inches by July. In comparison, 21.32 inches of precipitation were received in 2003.



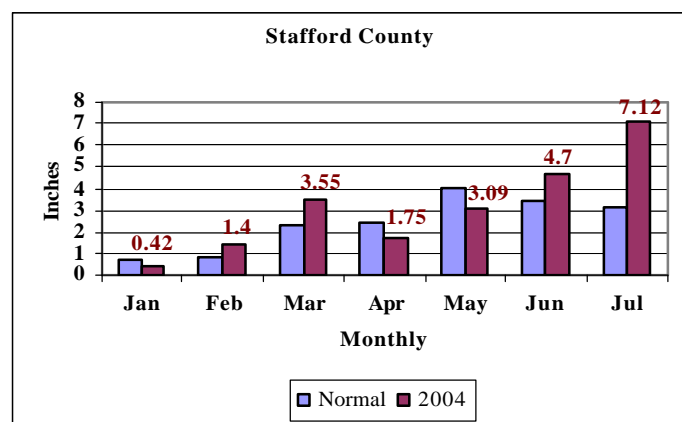
The 30 year average for Edwards County is 26.75 inches. In 2004, precipitation was above average, receiving 18.52 inches by July. In comparison, 19.24 inches of precipitation were received in 2003.



The 30 year average for Pawnee County is 23.99 inches. In 2004, precipitation was above average, receiving 20.89 inches by July. In comparison, 19.06 inches of precipitation were received in 2003.



The 30 year average for Rice County is 28.25 inches. In 2004, precipitation was above average, receiving 18.5 inches by July. In comparison, 24.01 inches of precipitation was received in 2003.



The 30 year average for Stafford County is 26.03 inches. In 2004, precipitation was above average, receiving 22.03 inches by July. In comparison, 23.82 inches of precipitation were received in 2003.

If you prefer not to receive this newsletter in the future, please contact Eve Tracy at (785) 296-3705 or etracy@kda.state.ks.us.

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Division of Water Resources
109 SW 9th Street, 2nd Floor
Topeka, KS 66612-1283

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CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE!

www.KSDA.gov

Public Meeting Announcements

All meetings are open to the public and other interested parties.

Middle Arkansas Working Group

9 a.m. November 10, 2004

Stafford Field Office
105 N. Main St.
Stafford, Kansas

Rattlesnake Partnership Meeting

1 p.m. November 10, 2004

Stafford Field Office
105 N. Main Street
Stafford, Kansas

Kansas Water Authority Meeting

9 a.m. November 17 and 18, 2004

El Dorado City Office
220 E. 1st Street
El Dorado, Kansas

Kansas Water Authority Meeting

January 26 and 27, 2005
Topeka, Kansas

Please contact Hank Ernst at
(785) 296-0877 for more
information.

Big Bend Groundwater Management District #5 Board Meeting

October 14, 2004 and
November 10, 2004

District Office
125 S. Main
Stafford, Kansas

Please contact Sharon Falk at
(620) 234-5352 for more information

Irrigation Transition Assistance Program (ITAP)

A public hearing is tentatively
scheduled for December, to allow
additional public input before final
approval and adoption of
regulations.

Please contact Scott Carlson at
(785) 296-3600 for more
information.